

## Four Democrats Circulate Legislation Creating New Regulations for Hospital Nurse Staffing

Led by Sen. Chris Larson (D-Milwaukee) and Rep. Francesca Hong (D-Madison), four Democratic lawmakers [circulated a proposal](#) that would limit the ability for hospitals to safely staff patient beds and, as experienced in other states, require hospitals to close services if state-mandated nurse staffing ratios cannot be sustained even if a hospital is capable of caring for patients.

Only one state in the nation, California, has implemented a nurse staffing ratio in its state hospitals. California's mandate doesn't even place California nurse staffing in the top 10 states for registered nurse staffing levels. California is ranked 19<sup>th</sup> according to the National Center for Workforce Analysis, as [reported by the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission](#). Wisconsin is ranked 7<sup>th</sup> and is among 17 other states *without* state-mandated nurse staffing ratios that have higher nurse staffing levels than California.

Similar proposals in several other states have been defeated at the ballot box once the public learns how these policies can limit access to care for patients and limit the ability of hospitals to tailor staffing to the needs of their patients, their workforce and their organization.

WHA's annual workforce data shows Wisconsin's hospitals have never employed more registered nurses than they do today. According to [Becker's](#), Wisconsin also has the 11<sup>th</sup> highest hourly rates, after adjusting for cost-of-living, for registered nurses. Wisconsin's hospitals continue to invest in registered nursing, with nearly 4,000 positions currently open—the highest vacancy rate the state has experienced in the last two decades, detailed in [WHA's 2023 Workforce Report](#).

"Wisconsin hospitals and health systems provide quality care each and every day, something affirmed recently when the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services announced [Wisconsin had the fourth most five-star-rated hospitals in the country](#)," said WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding.

"While we share concerns about the staffing trends taking place within our industry as our state's population continues to age, it's important that we continue to find ways to strengthen our workforce pipeline in a way that does not apply a one-size-fits-all approach to our members," continued Borgerding.

In the state budget passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Tony Evers, WHA worked with the Joint Finance Committee to make registered nurse training programs eligible for a grant program that incentivizes the creation or expansion of training programs for allied health professions. Funding in the program was increased by 500% over the next two years, as WHA communicated to lawmakers the need that exists to expand our nurse workforce pipeline. This funding opportunity is now open and interested members should read the [August 24, 2023 edition](#) of *The Valued Voice* to learn more. The application deadline for this round of funding is Oct. 9, 2023.

Without receiving Republican support, the proposal from Sen. Larson and Rep. Hong is unlikely to become law in the current Legislature.

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